

CHAPTER XIII

THE FOUNDATION OF CONSTANTINOPLE

WE come now to the greatest political achievement of Constantine's reign—the foundation of a new Rome. Let us ask at the outset what led him to take a step so decisive as the transference of the world's metropolis from the Italian peninsula to the borders of Europe and Asia. The ascription of merely personal motives will not suffice. We are told by Zosimus that Rome was distasteful to Constantine, because it reminded him of the son and the wife who had fallen victims to his private resentment. He was uneasy in the palace on the Palatine, whose very stones suggested murder and sudden death, and whose walls were cognisant of unnumbered treasons. What Zosimus says may very well be true. Constantine's conscience was likely to give him less peace in Rome than elsewhere, but the personal wishes of even the greatest men cannot bind the generations which come after them, there have been cities founded by the caprice of royal tyrants which have flourished for a season and then vanished. Seleucia is perhaps the most striking example, and scarcely a mound remains to mark its site.